



Food Safety & Nutrition

Preserving Summer Berries



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The berry season is upon us. First the strawberries, then raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and many kinds of wild berries such as Oregon grapes, gooseberries and huckleberries. This is such a glorious time of year for the small sweet berries and the products you can make with them. The berries are so wonderful fresh, but if you are like me you want to preserve some of that summer taste for those cooler winter months.

Purchase or harvest berries in the morning. Keep them refrigerated until you are ready to eat them or preserve them. Berries that are warm are softer and will spoil more quickly.

All berries freeze pretty well. If you plan to freeze the berries, do so as soon after picking as possible. Wash them well in cool running water and then dry and drain well. Get as much of the water droplets off the berries as possible. The extra water will form large ice crystals and soften the berries even more.

Freeze whole berries by placing them on a cookie sheet and placing the cookie sheet in the freezer. As soon as they have frozen solid, package them in freezer bags or containers. Do not use plastic storage bags or containers. They are not air or moisture tight and will not protect the flavor or prevent freezer burn.

Blueberries, elderberries and huckleberries have a skin on them that can become tough when frozen. You may want to consider steaming these berries for 1 minute and then cooled in ice water immediately. This will tenderize the skin and make a better flavored product. When freezing them then, just barely cover them with medium syrup (3 cups sugar to 4 cups water).

If you plan to sweeten the berries before freezing place cleaned berries in a shallow baking pan. Sprinkle sugar on them and gently mix. The shallow pan allows the berries to lie in single or double layers and prevents them from getting crushed in the mixing process. Then place sugared berries in the freezer bags or containers and freeze.

For crushed or pureed berries, sort, wash and drain. Crush berries and add sugar to taste. Stir gently until the sugar is dissolved, pack into containers, seal and freeze.

Jams and Jellies

Outside of freezing the most popular preserved products to make with berries are jams and jellies. To make successful jellied products you need the correct proportions of sugar, acid and pectin. When these ingredients are used in the correct proportions they form a gel that holds the fruit pieces, puree or juice into a thicken jam or jelly. Because the proportions are so crucial you should never double a recipe for jams or jellies. It takes a lot of sugar to form a gel. If you use less, you will end up with syrup or a very soft gel. If you use too much, sugar may not dissolve. These crystals will leave a sandy or gritty feel in the mouth.

Do not double a recipe either. It takes too much cooking time, which breaks down the pectin resulting in soft and runny fruit spreads. Boiling longer only makes the problem worse and may change the flavor and darken the color.

If you want to make a low sugar jam or jelly, be sure to use a pectin product for low sugar or sugarless jams and jellies. The pectin is designed to gel the fruit without the use of sugar or as much sugar. Many of them are formulated to use with artificial sugar products as well.

Jams and Jellies are most successful if you use commercial pectin and a mixture of overripe and under ripe berries. The under ripe berries provide more of the natural pectin and the overripe berries provide added flavor. Also berries, especially strawberries have more natural pectin in the early berries versus those from plants that are a little older. So jams and jellies that are made later in the season may need a little more pectin or more under ripe berries to set up.

Lastly, don't forget to process all pints and half pint jams and jellies in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes.

Syrups

Many of us may have syrups on our shelves that were jams gone wrong. There are some however that intentionally make syrups that have great flavor, color and consistency. Syrups can be made with or without pectin an lemon juice. Lemon juice may improve the color. Pectin is used to control the consistency of the syrup.

Syrups can be made with fruit puree or with fruit juice. Those made with fruit juice can be from fresh fruit in which the juice has been extracted or from commercial juices. It is suggested however if you use commercial juices to use some pectin.

Syrups do need to be processed in a boiling water bath canner in pints or half pint jars for 10 minutes.

Strawberry Butter

Yield 3 –half pints

2 quarts strawberries

2 cups sugar

2 tablespoons lemon juice

To prepare pulp: Wash and crush strawberries. Slowly simmer strawberries until soft, adding only enough water to prevent sticking (about ½ cup). Press through a sieve or food mill. Measure 5 cups strawberry pulp.

To make the butter: Combine strawberry pulp, sugar and lemon juice. Let stand 2-3 hours. Bring mixture to a boil. And reduce heat. Cook slowly until thick enough to round up on a spoon. As mixture thickens, stir to prevent sticking. Ladle hot butter into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Cover with two-piece lid and process for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bathe canner.

(Taken from the Ball Blue Book)

Strawberry-Lemon Marmalade

Yield 8 half pints

1 medium lemon

4 teaspoons baking soda

1 quart strawberries

1 package powdered pectin

6 cups sugar

Squeeze lemon half, reserving 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Remove pulp and white membrane from lemon peel. Thinly slice peel. Combine peel and baking soda in a small saucepan. Add just enough water to cover peel; simmer 5 minutes. Remove from heat: drain peel; set aside. Slice strawberries; measure 4 ½ cups prepared strawberries.

Combine strawberries, reserved lemon juice, lemon peel and pectin in a large saucepot. Bring slowly to a boil. Add sugar, stirring until dissolved. Bring to a rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Ladle hot marmalade into hot jars leaving ¼ inch headspace. Cover with two-piece lids and process for 10 minutes in a boiling water canner.

(Taken from the Ball Blue Book)

Syrups from Fruit Puree

To prepare fruit puree:

Sort, stem and wash ripe fruit or thaw frozen, unsweetened fruit; crush fruit thoroughly, and measure crushed fruit. Add 12 cup boiling water to each 4 cups crushed fruit and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer to soften – about 5 minutes for soft fruits and about 10 minutes for fruits like cherries and grapes. Press through a sieve.

To make syrup:

4 cups puree

4 cups sugar

½ package or less powdered pectin

3 -4 tablespoons lemon juice

1. Mix puree, sugar and pectin and lemon juice.
2. Bring to boil and stir for 2 minutes or until jell thermometer registers 218 degrees F.
3. Remove from heat, skim off foam, and pour into ½ pint or pint canning jars to within ½ inch of top
4. Adjust lids and process in boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes.

(Take from WSU Publication EB 0976 – syrups from Washington Fruits)
